DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 534 JC 870 469

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TITLE Plan for Planning: Butler County Community College's Long-Range Strategic Planning System. Revised.
INSTITUTION Butler County Community Coll., Butler, PA.
PUB DATE Aug 87
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Planning; Community Colleges; *Long Range Planning; *Participative Decision Making; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

In 1985-86, Butler County Community College (BCCC) was awarded a Title III Planning Grant, which allowed the college to develop a long-range strategic planning process. Expected outcomes of the process were to define future directions for BCCC, capitalize upon present and future realities, provide systematic processes whereby the college is able to maintain or change its posture in fulfilling its mission, and achieve other objectives related to institutional image, resource allocation, program coordination, and college administration. The major aspects of the BCCC planning process included the following: discussion of mission and goals, internal assessment, external assessment, values clarification, development of planning assumptions, identification of strategic issues, campus-wide hearings, setting of priorities, and development of unit plans, dean plans, and the college plan. Within BCCC's planning structure is a Planning Council consisting of the five college deans and at least one representative apiece from faculty, staff, community, and the student body. The Council uses internal and external assessment data provided by the Dean of Institutional Research to develop planning assumptions, identify strategic issues, commission position papers, and set institutional priorities. This structure also calls for a close linking of budgeting and planning. Based on a spring 1987 evaluative meeting of the planning council, recommendations for improving the planning process were made, stressing the increased involvement of trustees, the president, and deans. (UCM)

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PLAN FOR PLANNING: BUTLER COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLANNING SYSTEM

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Revised: August, 1987

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Plan for Planning:
Butler County Community College's Long-Range Strategic Planning System

ABSTRACT

This document describes the long-range strategic planning system in use at Butler County Community College, (BCCC), Butler, PA. Objectives for planning are listed, followed by a description of the planning process. The planning process includes discussion of mission and goals, internal assessment, external assessment, values, planning assumptions, identification of strategic issues, campus-wide hearings, setting priorities, unit plans, dean plans, and the College plan. The use of position papers, and the integration of planning and budgeting, are emphasized. The planning structure and planning technology in use at BCCC are then described. Evaluation of planning is also reviewed. Finally, additional thoughts for planners are offered. An attachment lists current BCCC planning assumptions as a help for those who are less familiar with the role of planning assumptions in a long-range planning process.

BUTLER COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In 1985-86, Butler County Community College (BCCC) was awarded a Title III Planning Grant. This funding allowed the College to develop a long-range strategic planning process that has been vital in moving the College forward. Two nationally known planning consultants, Dr. Byron McClenney and Dr. Kay Moore McClenney, worked with the College to help develop and evaluate the planning process. They also presented two on-campus professional development workshops (one in 1985 and one in 1986) for the College's administrators, unit heads, and all Planning Council members.

OBJECTIVES FOR PLANNING

Listed below are the expected outcomes of planning at Butler County Community College.

- To define future directions for the College.
- To capitalize upon present and future realities.
- To provide systematic processes whereby the College is able to both maintain or change its posture in fulfilling its mission.
- To enhance congruity of goals and objectives at all levels of the College.
- To continue communicating a common view of the College, its priorities, and its significant issues.
- To prioritize the use of limited resources for maximum impact.
- To better coordinate academic, student services, continuing education, financial, and facilities plans and management.
- To improve institutional management for increased effectiveness and efficiency.
- To implement planning as a critical but regular responsibility of all College administrators.

Figure 1 shows the planning system being used at BCCC. Discussion will be divided into the three major components of the system: planning process, planning technology, and planning structure. Planning process refers to the actual flow and substance of planning activities. Planning structure is the way in which the institution is organized for planning, including the responsibilities and reporting authority of planning committees and planning officers. The third component, planning technology, refers to the data, information, assessments, analyses, and forecasts that are fed into the planning process. All three planning components are important and interdependent.

PLANNING PROCESS

These major aspects of the BCCC planning process, although divided into "steps," overlap and are interrelated.

Mission and Goals

There can be no doubt that clarity of purpose forms the framework for decision making about the future of the College. Because college missions ordinarily evolve slowly, the BCCC mission and goals statement is reviewed as a part of planning only every three years (1984-85, 1987-88). Key questions for review include, What are we really doing?, What should we be doing?, What values really matter here?

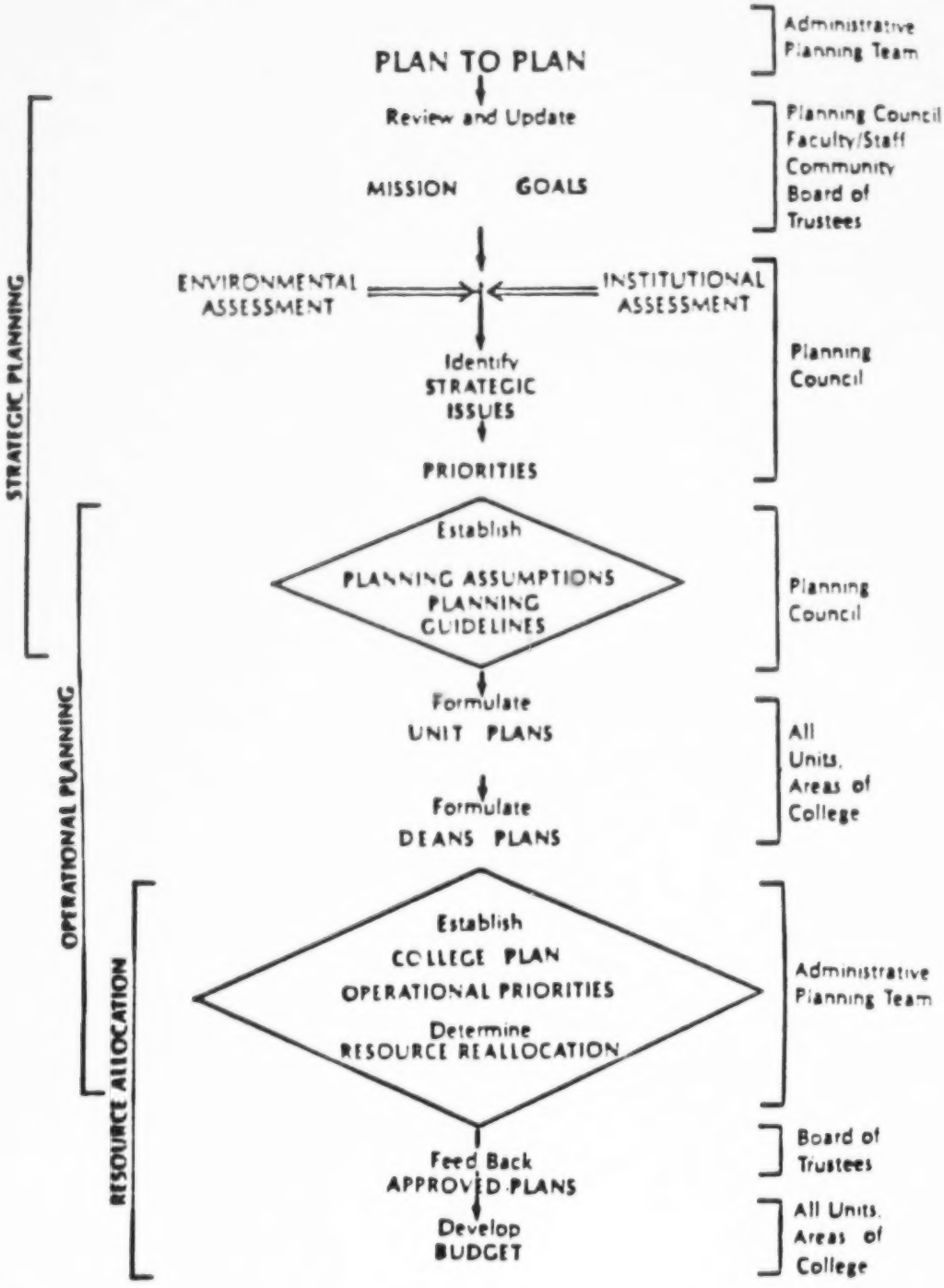
Internal Assessment

Internal assessment identifies the College's strengths and weaknesses, and thus, its capacity to move in new directions. A variety of studies and documents are being used:

- BCCC Comprehensive Self-Study, 1985
- Middle States Evaluation Team Report, 1985
- Findings from Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 1985
- Student Retention Study, 1986
- BCCC Economic Impact Study, 1986

Figure 1

PLANNING PROCESS AT BUTLER COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



- Survey of Butler County High School Seniors, 1986
- Developmental Mathematics Study, 1986
- BCCC Fact Sheets:
  Credit Student Profiles, each semester
  Employee Characteristics, each fall
- Academic Program Evaluations:
  Humanities, 1986
  Computer Data Processing, 1986
  Park & Recreation Management, 1986
  Biological Sciences, 1987
  Physical Sciences, 1987
  Education, 1987
  Foodservice, 1987
  Merchandising/Retailing, 1987
- Student Advising Report, 1987
- Evening Student Survey, 1987
- Developmental Education Report, 1987
- Student Testing/Placement Report, 1987
- Community Needs Assessment and BCCC Marketing Plan, 1987
- Campus Facilities Master Plan, 1987
- Graduate Follow-Up Studies, yearly

External Assessment

Finding useful external assessment data is more difficult. Its purpose is to identify environmental opportunities, threats, and trends that have implications for BCCC. Areas of interest encompass demographic, economic, social, technological, and political factors. Fortunately, a number of public and private agencies can provide external assessment information.

- Demographic data and analysis are common in the higher education literature.
- Butler County Planning Office provides current demographic information for this service area.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education and Intermediate Unit IV publish public and nonpublic school enrollments, and live birth data.
- Demographic forecasts from College Board, American Council on Education, the Penn State University Institute of State and Regional Affairs, and AACJC.

- Freshman student survey results from the ACE/UCLA Cooperative Institutional Research Program.
- Occupational forecasts from the southwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission.
- Mellon Economic Briefings, monthly.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education Labor Market Area Report, yearly.
- Student financial aid impact reports.
- Economic profile from Urban and Regional Planning Program, University of Pittsburgh.
- State Plan for Vocational Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- Regular reading of publications from AACJC, ACE, CASE, SCUP, AIR, Middle States Association, Chronicle of Higher Education, and New Directions.
- BCCC holds membership in the area Chamber of Commerce, the Butler Community Development Corporation, the Pittsburgh High Technology Council, and in many professional education associations.

Values

Conclusions come from the perceptions and values of decision makers more than they do from data. Values are critical determinants of all decisions and are expressed in a college's mission, goals, objectives, and budget, whether recognized or not. As is most often the case, the BCCC planning process deals with values clarification via a broadly representative planning committee and through efforts to bring forth basic issues for discussion.

Planning Assumptions

Assessment data--especially from the external environment--is analyzed to develop planning assumptions. These planning assumptions describe future conditions that will effect the College, but over which the College has little or no control. Planning assumptions are the bridge between assessment data and action objectives. Some current BCCC planning assumptions appear as attachment #1.

Strategic Issues

Based on assessment data, values, and assumptions, strategic issues are identified. These are the three to seven, or so, most important problems, needs, or opportunities facing the College now, and for the next two or three years. The strategic issues are a listing of the most challenging needs of BCCC.

Hearings

Since 1986, the BCCC planning process has included a College-wide hearing at which all personnel are encouraged to come and express their views to Planning Council members. This is very important in helping the Planning Council to identify, and thus prioritize, strategic issues. In 1987, a questionnaire was also sent to all employees asking them to identify and rank potential planning issues.

Priorities

Strategic issues for the coming year are then prioritized by the Planning Council, but with campus-wide input as noted above. At this point, the work of the Planning Council is complete, except for evaluation.

Unit Plans

Each unit head for planning purposes is also a cost center head for budgeting. This is the beginning of the very important linkage between planning and resource allocation, as shown in Figure 2. Unit heads receive from the Planning Council the planning assumptions and the prioritized strategic issues. From these, and in consultation with their unit members, a three year unit plan is prepared and submitted to the appropriate dean. The Plan has three parts: accomplishments for the current year, objectives for next year, and projections for the following year.

Figure 2

LINKING STRATEGIC PLANNING, OPERATIONAL PLANNING, AND THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES: AN INTEGRATED PLANNING PROCESS

Dean Plans

Each dean, based upon and in concert with the appropriate unit plans, develops a three year plan for his or her division. These include accomplishments for the current year, objectives for next year, and projections for the following year. They are submitted to the College president.

College Plan

In a retreat setting, the president and deans use the dean-level plans to negotiate and develop a three year College Plan. The College Plan is presented for discussion to the Board of Trustees, also in a retreat setting. This is an absolutely essential step as it is ultimately the responsibility of the trustees to establish directions for the College. The Board has been represented on the Planning Council by two trustee members so that ideas and views have been exchanged from the beginning of the process.

Budgeting

Planning and budgeting are two sides of the same coin; a budget is a numerical representation of a plan, Figure 2. The BCCC planning process is scheduled to coincide with the budgeting process. Current budget revisions and adoption of future budgets are done soon after planning in order to be sure that the College's resources (money, people, time, space) are being used to achieve planned objectives.

Continuous

The planning process is repeated each year so that plans are continually updated.

Position Papers

It is not surprising that in 1986 the Planning Council identified four areas about which it had inadequate information for decision making. These were community college writing-across-the-curriculum, campus-wide computer

literacy, the concept of a student developmental learning center, and student placement testing. College committees were already working on the two latter issues and their reports will be available to next year's Council. Concerning writing-across-the-curriculum and computer literacy, the Planning Council commissioned a position paper to be written on each. These two papers are being prepared by BCCC faculty to include a literature search, a review of current BCCC practices, operationalized definitions, and recommendations for future action or discussion. A $300 stipend is attached to each Position Paper.

PLANNING STRUCTURE

BCCC has organized for planning in the following ways.

1. A Planning Council is appointed by the president at the start of the academic year. Only about 1/3 of the membership changes each year in order to provide for continuity. The five deans are permanent members. Faculty, chairpersons, students, trustees, secretarial staff, maintenance, and the community are all represented by at least one member. The Planning Council reports to the president but the president is not currently a Council member.

2. It is the responsibility of the Dean of Institutional Research to provide the Council with internal and external assessment data. The Council then reviews findings, develops planning assumptions, identifies strategic issues, commissions Position Papers, and sets institutional priorities. The unit heads, deans, president, and trustees do the actual planning.

3. As noted earlier, it is of the utmost importance to keep planning and budgeting closely linked. The BCCC planning system is also linked with other activities. For example, one criteria for the allocation of faculty professional development funds is the extent to which the proposed development activity is important to one of the College's strategic issues or planned objectives for the year. Also, administrators are being asked to base employee performance evaluation, in large part, on the achievement of the planning objectives.

PLANNING TECHNOLOGY

Planning technology at BCCC remains simple. The College does not yet have an integrated, on-line management information system. Computer programs must be written in-house in order to create specialized reports. Much data is retrieved by hand. Computer modeling capacity is not available.

As was apparent earlier, a great deal of external assessment data is derived from outside sources, as it should be. An increase in the College's computer resources will allow for more sophisticated internal studies and analyses in the future.

The lists of internal and external reports on pages 2 to 4 are a part of the technology related to planning.

EVALUATION

The 1986-87 Planning Council held a two hour evaluative meeting in the spring, 1987. Seven recommendations for improvement were made and forwarded to the president.

1. A "Planning Calendar" will be developed at the first meeting of the 1987-88 Planning Council. This will facilitate the coordination of planning with the budget cycle. Because the College's initial budget must be prepared 1½ years in advance, coordination of budget with plans occurs during rebudgeting.

2. Ways need to be found to get the Trustees into the planning loop earlier. Perhaps next year, each proposed objective can be discussed at a meeting of the trustees with the president and deans. This would be an expansion of the kind of discussion that took place at the March Board retreat.

3. The involvement of the president in planning needs to be strengthened but it was not felt that he should become a regular Planning Council member. Instead, it may be appropriate for next year's Council to meet with him as strategic issues are being identified and prioritized.

4. A weakness remains at the Dean's level of the planning process. It is important for each dean to meet with all appropriate unit managers as a group in order to negotiate and develop the Dean's plan.

5. Linkages should be developed between planned objectives and each manager's performance evaluation. In other words, an important part of evaluation should be the achievement of the year's planned goals and outcomes. This should become a major evaluative criteria.

6. The BCCC Plan is not now distributed beyond the campus. There is much to be gained by wider dissemination.

7. Achievement of each year's plan should become part of the president's annual report to the Board.

Dr. Steven VanAusdle, now president of Walla Walla Community College in Washington, has developed an "Evaluation of Institutional Planning System." This assessment covers essential conditions for effective planning, essential planning process components and activities, and significant outcomes and/or contributions for effective institutional planning. The 1987-88 Planning Council will use it to further evaluate Butler County Community College's planning efforts.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

Planning may threaten many people. This is not an irrational response. Planning implies change; change implies uncertainty; uncertainty is stressful.

An established planning system decreases the effectiveness of management by charisma, by persuasion, by hidden agenda, and by the end run.

A new planning system should be introduced gradually and be in harmony with the usual practices, procedures, and traditions of the institution. It is best done by people who know and respect the College's history. An outside consultant must be sensitive to this fact.

It may be unwise to introduce institutional planning with great fanfare. Don't promise too much. Planning does not eliminate risks or solve problems. Planning only increases the probability that an institution will be able to use its limited resources to better define and reach its goals.

Judgments, educated guesses -- even hunches -- are valid planning input. So too are preferences of the College's top administrators, trustees, and sponsors. Data systems need not be sophisticated to enhance planning.

The Planning Council does not plan. The planning office staff does not plan. These groups facilitate the process, set up calendars, decide on assumptions, interpret data, and provide the perspective of their constituents. It is the College's administrators who plan.

Higher education is replete with planning efforts which were tried and failed. It may take three years of unflinching allegiance to the College's planning system before most people in the institution will believe that it is a serious effort, that it will persist, and that they can commit themselves to it.

These are the three most important conditions for successful planning:

1. The total dedication of the College's president to the need for planning.

2. The integration of planning and budgeting, without exception. Those who ignore the planning process receive few resources. It won't happen twice.

3. Planning is continuous, ongoing.

Butler County Community College

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

1. The population of Butler County continues to increase at a rate of about 1.5% per year; this growth will accelerate and will occur almost exclusively in the southwestern portion of the County.

   This assumption has important implications for the location of future off-campus instructional sites and for enrollment projections.

2. The majority of BCCC students will continue to be women, often over age 22 and will attend part-time.

   Future academic program development must focus on the curriculum preferences/needs of women and must be scheduled for part-time as well as for full-time students. In light of this assumption, it is not surprising that curriculums originally developed for full-time male students (who constituted 70% of the College's student population 20 years ago) must be redesigned. This assumption also has many implications for a wide variety of needed student services, College marketing and admissions, and job placement, or transfer assistance.

3. The number of new high school graduates in Butler County will decline only slightly over the next five years.

   This is good news for student recruitment and enrollment projections. Overall, BCCC has been able to enroll a very substantial percentage of the graduates of County high schools. This ranges from about 5% in the most outlying area to a high of almost 18%, and is based on the total number of all graduates, not just on college-bound graduates.

4. During the next decade, the 35 to 44 year old age group will increase the most; senior citizens will also grow briskly in numbers.

   This assumption not only impacts on enrollment projections but, most importantly, must be recognized when planning credit, noncredit, and community services offerings.

5. Almost 1/3 of Butler County residents over the age of 30 have not completed high school; fewer than 12% hold bachelor's degrees.

Of those who have not completed high school, almost 1/2 have only an elementary education. These facts impact heavily on the kind of academic preparation BCCC students have, and on the need for developmental (remedial) programming, tutoring, and basic literacy training.

6. Butler County's minority population will continue to be small, requiring very special efforts to attract minority students, faculty, and staff to the College.

Less than 1/2 of 1% of the citizens of Butler County are black. BCCC has consistently maintained black student enrollment that exceeds this percentage. Black student retention and graduation rates exceed those of white students. The College has a black member on its governing Board of Trustees. Recruiting black faculty and staff, however, has been difficult.

7. The Butler County Community College faculty will continue to be mature and stable; retirements will be delayed by changed federal laws.

As is true at most educational institutions, BCCC faculty are stable, highly tenured, and average age is in the 40s. As of 1993, elimination of mandatory retirement may mean that many will continue teaching well into their 70s or beyond. This will effect personnel policy needs as well as many aspects of the College's relationships with its students.

8. In order to be well educated for the future, an individual will need to achieve computer and technical literacy.

Implication for faculty development and curriculum planning are clear. This is a very major undertaking.

9. The physical plant of the College is crowded and aging.

A 1987 professional engineering study indicated that $1.5 to, $2 million is needed just to restore current campus buildings. Student classrooms and labs are full and (in some cases literally) overflowing.

10. There is no evidence of any strong resurgence in the Butler County economy in the foreseeable future.

This assumption has broad implications for all services offered by the College. For example, our very successful Job Search Program will continue to be needed indefinitely. Economic development activities are becoming more and more central to the College's mission.

11. Job growth in the local and regional economy will continue to be in the service and retail sectors.

Since the College intends to prepare many graduates for immediate vocational employment, this assumption has strong implications for curriculum development.

12. Other institutions of higher education in the area are competing more vigorously for students, and are also establishing new facilities in the southwest growth area of Butler County.

Butler County Community College must continue to build upon its strengths and eliminate its weaknesses in order to maintain strength in its market niche.

13. A 1987 professional external community assessment/marketing study commissioned by BCCC revealed the following group of planning assumptions:

a. The demand for credit and noncredit courses is equal.

b. Curricular demand is entirely in the business, finance, computers, health, and engineering areas.

c. There is no community demand for liberal arts or science programs.

d. There is significant room for growth in the adult, part-time student market.

e. Many Butler County residents desire weekend classes.

f. An expanded facility, with a professional atmosphere and many more courses, is needed in the southwest area of the County.

g. Low tuition and comprehensive educational offerings will constitute BCCC's advantage over other colleges in the area.

h. There is a high need among current students for career planning.

i. Butler County Community College functions as a good away-from-home liberal arts college for recent high school graduates from northern counties.

j. Butler County Community College faculty receive high ratings for personal attention to students.

k. Butler County high school teachers and counselors see high student attention by the College faculty as therapy, not quality.

l. Area employers are eager to work with BCCC in developing skill-based, occupational training courses. They are not interested in degrees or transfer courses for their employees.

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